

COMPENDIUM: COMMUNITY POLICING
AND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE IN JAILS PART 5.3b

CASE STUDY

Town Sheriff Model

Los Angeles County (California) Sheriff's Department

Karen L. Amendola and Maria Valdovinos Olson



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice



National Policing Institute
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Compendium Contents

<u>Part 1</u>	Adapting Community-Oriented Policing Strategies and Procedural Justice for Jail Communities
<u>Part 2</u>	Quick Reference Guide
<u>Part 3</u>	Research Brief
<u>Part 4</u>	Promising Practices, Examples of Promising Practices from the Field
<u>Part 5.1</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Pathways ARC (Achieving Recovery by Choice) Franklin County (Ohio) Sheriff's Office
<u>Part 5.2</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> The Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education (I.G.N.I.T.E.) Program Genesee County (Michigan) Sheriff's Office
<u>Part 5.3a</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Gender Responsive Programming Los Angeles County (California) Sheriff's Department
<u>Part 5.3b</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Town Sheriff Model Los Angeles County (California) Sheriff's Department
<u>Part 5.4</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Familiar Faces Action and Community Transition (F ² ACT) Program Louisville (Kentucky) Metro Department of Corrections
<u>Part 5.5</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Behavioral Care Center (BCC) Davidson County (Tennessee) Sheriff's Office
<u>Part 5.6</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> The Farm Program Plymouth County (Massachusetts) Sheriff's Office
<u>Part 5.7</u>	<i>Case Study.</i> Sheriff's Anti-Trafficking Initiative (SATI) Suffolk County (New York) Sheriff's Office
<u>Part 6</u>	Jails and Community-Based Strategies Survey Community Oriented Policing Strategies Employed in Jail Communities
<u>Part 7</u>	Pandemic Behind Bars—Lessons Learned in Handling COVID-19 in Jails Strategy Brief
<u>Part 8</u>	Appendix A. Agencies that Participated in the Survey
<u>Part 9</u>	Appendix B. Focus Group Overview and Script

Part 5.3b Contents

Overview	PART 5.3b 5
What is the Town Sheriff model?	PART 5.3b 5
How does the Town Sheriff model exemplify the principles of community policing?	PART 5.3b 6
How was the Town Sheriff model implemented?	PART 5.3b 6
Town Sheriff model problem solving and partnership components	PART 5.3b 7
Did the Town Sheriff model work?	PART 5.3b 9
Challenges	PART 5.3b 10
Why are these findings important for jail management?	PART 5.3b 10
Appendix A. Informed Consent Survey	PART 5.3b 11
Appendix B. Sample Inmate Questions (Procedural Justice)	PART 5.3b 12
References	PART 5.3b 13
About the Authors	PART 5.3b 14
About the National Policing Institute (formerly known as the National Police Foundation)	PART 5.3b 15
About the COPS Office	PART 5.3b 16

Los Angeles County (California) Men's Central Jail

Current Sheriff: Alex Villanueva

Sheriff during study: Jim McDonnell

Number of beds/inmates: While the L.A. County Jail system houses thousands of inmates, the model in this study was applied among one classification of approximately 400 incarcerated individuals.

Overview

In 2017, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) sought to implement an applied community policing model within the men's jail in an effort to promote a healthier and safer jail community, decrease the number of grievances, improve responsiveness to grievances, reduce violence, and reduce the need for disciplinary actions toward inmates. To identify a pilot model to test out, command staff held an internal competition among jail personnel and ultimately selected the Town Sheriff model as the community policing approach they would implement.

What is the Town Sheriff model?

The Town Sheriff model is a coordination-focused jail management model that draws upon the key components of the community-oriented policing (COP) philosophy: community partnerships, problem solving, and organizational transformation. In the specific jail unit at the LASD, the immediate problems were (a) unacknowledged complaints and unresolved grievances and (b) potential health and safety issues.



Front entrance of LASD Men's Central Jail

In the Men's Central Jail, the Town Sheriff model was implemented on the floor that houses gay and bisexual men and transgender women. In Los Angeles County, this population is segregated from the general population and is housed in three separate dorms on one floor of the jail. In collaboration with the LASD, the National Police Foundation (now known as the National Policing Institute) was able to examine the implementation of this program as well as measure its efficacy in influencing a variety of important safety and health outcomes.

How does the Town Sheriff model exemplify the principles of community policing?

Community-oriented policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of community partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues (see figure 1) (COPS Office 2014).

Community policing and procedural justice approaches adapted for jail settings have the potential to increase legitimacy. As noted in the introduction to this compendium, there is limited research on adapting community policing for jails, especially in terms of factors contributing to inmates' and correctional officers' perceptions of procedural justice and legitimacy (Lambert, Hogan, and Griffin 2007; Franke, Bieri, and MacKenzie 2010).

Problem-solving. The Town Sheriff model was implemented to address various problems such as the high number of inmate grievances and health and wellness challenges. This implementation presented a unique opportunity to test the efficacy

of the Town Sheriff model in terms of addressing grievances, reducing health and wellness concerns, and promoting cooperation. The ability to gain compliance, cooperation, and rule adherence is key to maintaining order in correctional settings. As such, the need for inmates to see correctional officers as legitimate authorities is paramount to achieving effective compliance and control and creating an environment in which risks are reduced and mutual respect is established. The program relied on partnerships with various in-house partners (food services, medical services, etc.) to address grievances more efficiently and rapidly.

How was the Town Sheriff model implemented?

The implementation of the model involved a team-based coordination effort under the auspices of the Town Sheriff—a selected deputy—who served as the primary liaison for solving problems internally, for

Figure 1. Community policing components



Source: COPS Office, "About the COPS Office," accessed December 9, 2021, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/aboutcops>.

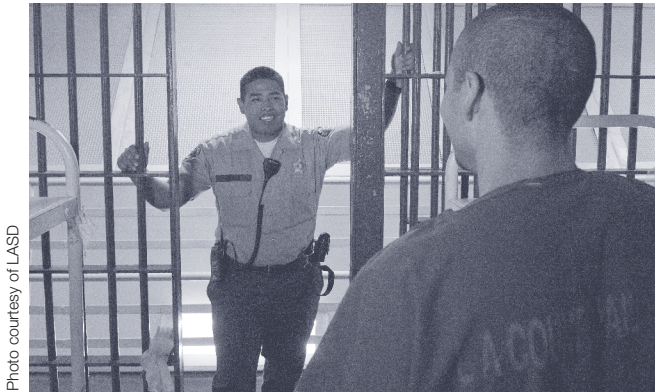


Photo courtesy of LASD

An LASD sheriff's deputy checks in with an inmate

example, by responding to inmates with concerns or grievances to intervene earlier than would have been done through a formal grievance process. As liaison, the Town Sheriff was also responsible for conducting outreach internally and externally as well as overseeing the new jail management model (with support functions completed by other deputies on the floor as part of their regular duties).

As implemented, the Town Sheriff model comprised a strategy for jail management that sought to enhance an existing repertoire of **problem-solving strategies** through the **development of partnerships** to address inmate grievances and problems of both a general and specific nature. The model sought to increase the presence and responsiveness of jail staff for those incarcerated, not in the sense of increased supervision but instead centered around communication and information sharing for improved problem solving through internal and external liaisons and partnerships.

Town Sheriff model problem solving and partnership components

Increased presence. The Town Sheriff support team consisted of three sergeants, three bonus deputies, 15 deputy sheriff generalists, 14 custody assistants, and the deputy serving as the face of the Town Sheriff. Custody staff conducted town hall meetings and addressed general concerns and problems that could be resolved at the line level (e.g., additional cleaning supplies and general maintenance issues).

External liaison and partnership. The external liaison and partnership effort included outreach to external units to have representatives come onto the floor to provide information on specific concerns. It also included the establishment of partnerships with the Medical Services Bureau and Department of Mental Health to ensure inmates had access to medical services and prescription medications as well as information related to specific health concerns. Additional partnerships were established with the Food Services Unit to address general questions, concerns, and problems related to special diets, spoiled food, or religious dietary restrictions. The partnership with the Community Transition Unit helped facilitate access to specialized external programs related to re-entry (e.g., ankle monitoring and employment, substance use counseling).

Information sharing. Information sharing was facilitated as part of the town hall meetings to address specific concerns and problem solve specific issues. For example, if residents had a concern about HIV, efforts were undertaken to have an HIV

specialist present at the meeting to answer questions. To the extent possible, access was facilitated for external groups such as the LGBT Community Center to come in and share information about population-specific services and programs.

Although a single deputy was the face of this approach, the approach represented a team strategy, and its success relied on partnerships. Partnerships in this model consisted of collaborative engagements between custody staff, inmates, and relevant external stakeholders such as bureaus, units, programs, and services to accomplish the interrelated goals of developing solutions to identified problems while increasing inmate trust in the staff (COPS Office 2014).

In addition to acting as a liaison, another key responsibility of the Town Sheriff was to help address inmate grievances and problems. In the framework

of community policing, problem solving is defined as the process of engaging in the proactive and systematic examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate effective responses (COPS Office 2014). In the jail setting, bringing inmate grievances or problems toward effective resolutions often required coordination with multiple entities. As inmates would typically not have access to those entities that could address the grievance (e.g., food services or medical services) the Town Sheriff came to represent an advocate who was there to ensure common understanding between them and the other segments of the jail. In addition, the stability of having one person assigned to this role led incarcerated individuals to associate the Town Sheriff with accountability and predictability, which was designed to increase trust in the staff (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Town Sheriff advocacy



Did the Town Sheriff model work?

Evaluation via a survey and administrative data.

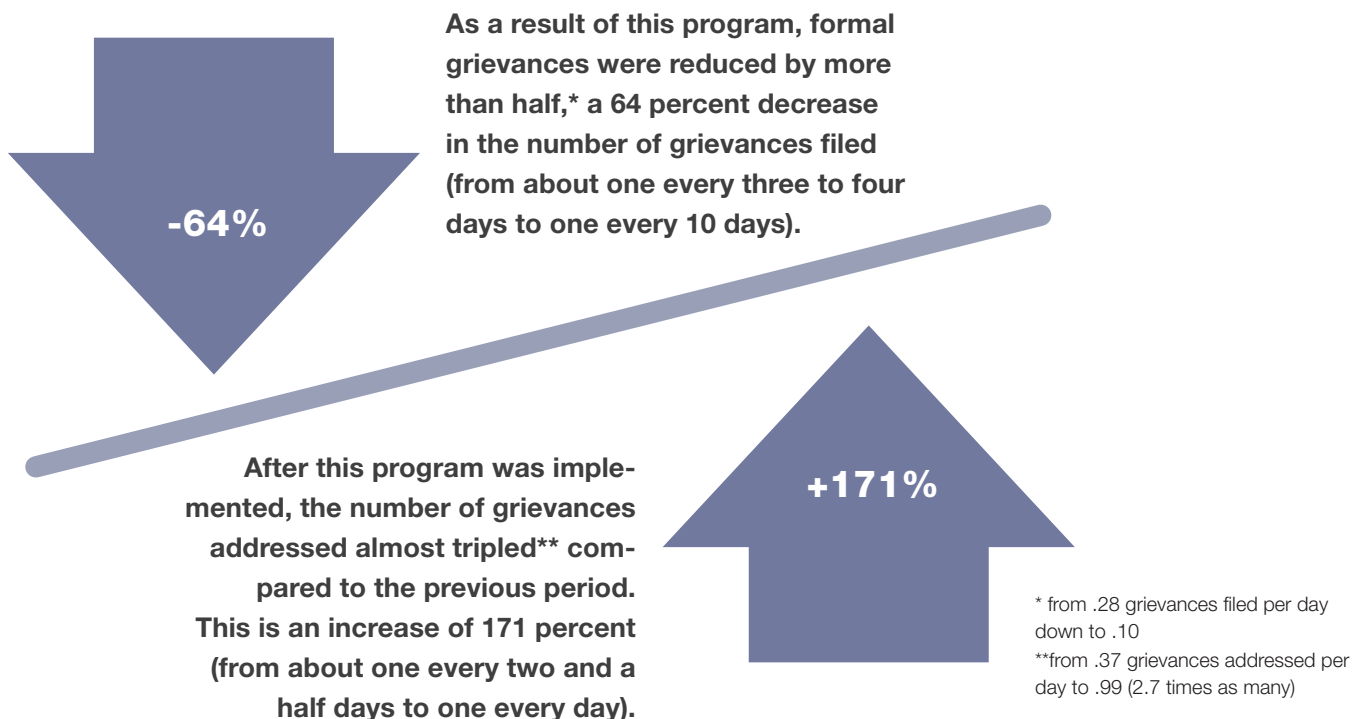
As a partner to the LASD, and with funding from the California Endowment, the National Police Foundation (now known as the National Policing Institute) worked with the agency to evaluate the program by developing a set of measures that would be implemented in a pre-post survey approach. Participants were asked to voluntarily—through a formal consent process (see appendix A)—complete surveys prior to the implementation of the program, and then again six months after its initial implementation. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. The surveys consisted of a range of health and safety indicators (see appendix B for some sample items). In addition, the LASD worked with the National Police Foundation to provide administrative data on grievances and disciplinary actions.

Successes demonstrated through the outcome assessment.

This pre-post evaluation design allowed the research partner to examine the potential impact of the program on specific measures related to personal and environmental conditions such as safety, privacy, and health as well as administrative measures pertaining to disciplinary actions, rule violations, grievances filed, and grievances addressed.

While there were no significant findings with regard to health, wellness, or safety measures, there was a meaningful reduction in total grievances filed and an increase in the percentage of grievances that were formally addressed. Specifically, there was a 64 percent decrease in grievance filings per day between the pre- and post- intervention period during which the model was implemented (see figure 3). This decrease suggests that the provision of a Town

Figure 3. Town Sheriff results



Sheriff on this floor reduced the need for residents to file formal grievances because their issues or concerns were being addressed at or very shortly after the problem occurred (Amendola, Valdovinos Olson, and Thorkildsen 2019).

In addition, there was a significant increase in the number of filed grievances that were addressed prior to the Town Sheriff implementation as compared to after. While only 0.37 grievances per day were addressed in the pre-intervention period, this rate increased to 0.99 addressed in the post-intervention period, most likely because of the reduction in the volume of formal grievances associated with the implementation of the Town Sheriff model. Because there was an increased focus on intervening prior to formal grievances being filed, this reduced the number of formal grievances filed, and there was a greater capacity to address the formal grievances that were filed in a more timely manner.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges we faced in evaluating this program was the lack of detail on exactly what the Town Sheriff staff did on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Although they provided a detailed explanation of the role of the Town Sheriff, the specific types of engagements with residents and other providers were not thoroughly documented, so it is unclear as to whether some aspects of the program worked better than others. Nevertheless, the

success of the program underscored the importance of the Town Sheriff and associated staff working to mediate grievances at the earliest stage. In terms of implementation, the biggest challenge for other agencies may be assigning one deputy who has this as a primary responsibility. However, for this 400-person unit, the Town Sheriff and other support staff working on the floor were more than capable of being responsive to individual complaints and grievances and getting them resolved in the moment, and the emphasis on the Town Sheriff program among inmates promoted transformative culture.

Why are these findings important for jail management?

During this intervention, key components of community policing such as problem solving, outreach, and collaboration (with other entities in the jail system) were employed in an effort to address inmate grievances. These findings are important because they indicate that a relatively simple and inexpensive community policing and procedural justice intervention in the jail can lead to a significant reduction in grievances filed and an increase in the level of grievances addressed. The idea behind this type of intervention is that timely reduction and resolution of grievances could enhance inmate quality of life and reduce some of the administrative burden associated with grievance remediation. It is likely that other jails could benefit from such an approach.

Appendix A.

Informed Consent Survey

STUDY ID LABEL

Survey of Health, Safety, Wellness, and Jail Activity *For Inmates*

Introduction: The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has agreed to participate in a research study to examine health, safety, and wellness in the county jail. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study by taking this survey. The survey contains questions about your overall health, beliefs, and feelings, how the jail staff treats you, and a few personal questions. You can skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. As a thank you for your participation, you will receive a commissary gift package.

Instructions: For each item, please mark the answer best matching your belief, feeling, level of agreement, or frequency with which certain things occur or have occurred. This is not a machine-readable survey, so you do not have to fill in the answer inside the bubble lines perfectly, just make sure your mark is readable. If you prefer, you can even make a small "x" or check-mark "✓".

Consent to participate:

In order to participate in the study please check the following boxes and sign below:

☐

I have received a copy of the informed consent agreement, and I understand that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I can contact any of the people listed by phone during regular business hours.

☐

I understand my signature below and/or completion and return of this survey indicates my consent to begin participating in this study.

PRINT Name

Signature

Date

Inmate ID #

Appendix B.

Sample Inmate Questions

(Procedural Justice)

8. Based on what you have heard or your own experience, how often would you say the correctional officers/assistants generally treat people in your unit with respect.

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Not very often
- ☐ Not at all often

9. About how often would you say the correctional officers/assistants make fair, impartial decisions related to jail activity?

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Not very often
- ☐ Not at all often

10. When dealing with people in this unit, how often would you say the correctional officers/assistants explain their decisions and actions related to jail activity?

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Not very often
- ☐ Not at all often

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

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About the Authors

Maria Valdovinos Olson is a Senior Research Associate at the National Policing Institute and doctoral candidate in sociology at George Mason University. Ms. Valdovinos Olson's primary area of research focuses on issues of safety, health, and wellness in the administration of justice, and she has expertise in policing, jails, and re-entry. She is currently co-principal investigator on a National Institute of Justice-funded project investigating the adverse impacts of organizational stress on officer health and wellness.

Her portfolio of work spans the areas of safety and wellness in policing and corrections, community policing in the United States and Mexico, and the impact of a procedural justice intervention on crime hot spots and police legitimacy. Recent work on gender responsive programming in jails, impact of restorative justice programming on recidivism, and development of a work-family conflict scale for police officers and their families has been published in, respectively, *Women and Criminal Justice*, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, and *Policing: An International Journal*. Ms. Valdovinos Olson earned her BA from Northwestern University and her MA in sociology from George Mason University.

Karen L. Amendola, PhD, is Chief Behavioral Scientist at the National Policing Institute, where she has worked for more than 25 years. She has worked with numerous law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. Just a few examples include Arlington, Texas; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago; Detroit; Newark, New Jersey; Seattle; Travis County, Texas; and Washington, D.C. Dr. Amendola recently completed a study with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department on community policing and gender responsiveness and has worked with other sheriffs' offices on the *Hiring in the Spirit of Service* initiative. With her colleagues, Amendola recently developed a work-family conflict scale published in *Policing: An International Journal* (2021). Currently she is the lead investigator (with her peers) on a study of organizational stress and its impact on police officers and sheriffs' deputies.

As an industrial/organizational psychologist, Dr. Amendola conducts research on officer safety, eyewitness identification, dog encounters, psychological measures, shift schedules, and community policing training and evaluation. She currently serves on the American Psychological Association's Presidential Committee on Use of Force against African Americans and recently served as the Chair of the Division of Experimental Criminology of the American Society of Criminology (2018 – 2019). Dr. Amendola is also a member of the American Society of Criminology, IACP, and the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology. With her colleagues, she won the prestigious Outstanding Experimental Field Trial for her examination of the impact of 8-, 10-, and 12-hour shifts and the impact of hours on health, safety, performance, and quality of life.

About the National Policing Institute (formerly known as the National Police Foundation)

The **National Policing Institute** is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to pursuing excellence through science and innovation in policing. As the country's oldest police research organization, the National Policing Institute has learned that police practices should be based on scientific evidence about what works best, the paradigm of evidence-based policing.

Established in 1970, the National Policing Institute has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure and works to transfer to local agencies the best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the National Policing Institute's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

To learn more, visit the National Policing Institute at www.policinginstitute.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.

Jails are communities in and of themselves, whose members are the individuals incarcerated and the correctional staff employed there; they are also part of the broader communities in which they are located, where the correctional staff live and to which the incarcerated population will eventually return. Community-oriented policing is as important in jails as it is in towns, cities, and counties; this compendium of community policing and procedural justice practices and programs, developed by the National Policing Institute and the National Sheriffs' Association, features research and promising practices as well as eight successful programs operated by seven sheriffs' departments that will be illuminating for other agencies nationwide.



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145 N Street NE
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2550 South Clark Street, Suite 1130
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